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RELEASED IN FULL

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ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-15	AMAD-01	CA-02	CIAE-00	SJK-01	C-01
	DODE-00	DS-00	HA-09	H-01	INRE-00	INR-01	L-03
	ADS-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OCS-06	OMB-01	PA-01	PM-01
	PRS-01	P-01	SNP-01	SP-01	SSO-00	SS-01	TRSE-00
	T-01	USIE-00	/050W				

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O 052128Z FEB 92 ZFF4  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8051  
INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM  
ARA COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 01195

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR  
TAGS: PREL, MARR, ASEC, CASC, PGOV, VE  
SUBJECT: COPEI PRESIDENT HILARION CARDOZO ON FEBRUARY 4  
COUP ATTEMPT

REF: CARACAS 01156 AND PREVIOUS

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. POLOFF MET WITH COPEI PRESIDENT HILARION CARDOZO ON  
FEBRUARY 5 TO DISCUSS THE PREVIOUS DAY'S COUP ATTEMPT.  
CARDOZO, WHO IS ALSO A SENATOR AND ONE OF THE THREE HIGH  
COMMISSIONERS FOR THE DELIMITATION OF VENEZUELA'S FRONTIER  
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WITH COLOMBIA IN THE GULF OF VENEZUELA, COMMENTED AS  
FOLLOWS.

THE COUP ATTEMPT: A NEAR MISS

3. CARDOZO, NOTING THAT THE REBELS AT LEAST INITIALLY  
GAINED CONTROL OF THREE OF THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT  
MILITARY INSTALLATIONS IN THE COUNTRY (BASES IN VALENCIA,  
MARACAY, AND MARACAIBO), AND FAILED ONLY IN CARACAS,  
BELIEVES THAT THEY CAME VERY CLOSE TO PROVOKING A REAL  
CIVIL WAR, IF NOT TO OUTRIGHT SUCCESS. THEIR MISTAKE, IN

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: NORMAN M BOUTON  
CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED  
DATE/CASE ID: 21 JUL 2008 200503656

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HIS OPINION, WAS THEIR FAILURE TO SECURE CARACAS TELEVISION AND RADIO STATIONS. IF LT. COL. HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS HAD GONE ON T.V. AND CALLED ON THE PEOPLE TO SUPPORT HIS PURGE OF CORRUPT POLITICIANS, HE WOULD IN CARDOZO'S OPINION PROBABLY HAVE RECEIVED ENOUGH POPULAR RESPONSE TO HAVE CAUSED A "MAJOR CIVIL WAR", AND HE MIGHT EVEN HAVE SUCCEEDED IN OVERTHROWING THE GOVERNMENT. (NOTE: WE HEAR SEPARATELY THAT THE REBELS DID CONTROL TV CHANNEL 8 FOR SEVERAL HOURS AND HAD A CASSETTE TAPE READY TO PUT ON THE AIR, BUT WERE PUT OFF BY A TECHNICIAN WHO CLAIMED THAT THE TAPE DID NOT FIT THE STATION'S MACHINES.)

#### REASONS FOR THE COUP ATTEMPT

4. CARDOZO ATTRIBUTED MOST OF THE REASONS FOR THE COUP ATTEMPT TO THE PERSONALITIES OF LT. COL. CHAVEZ FRIAS AND THE OTHER RINGLEADERS. ESPOUSING A TYPE OF WHAT CARDOZO CALLED "NATIONALISTIC SOCIALISM," THEY GRADUALLY FELL UNDER THE SELF-DELUSION THAT THEY HAD THE ANSWER TO THE NATION'S PROBLEMS, WHICH THEY BLAMED ON CORRUPT POLITICAL

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AND MILITARY LEADERS. CARDOZO HASTENED TO ADD THAT THE COUP PLOTTERS HAD NOT ACTED IN A VACUUM. THE "OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS" FOR A COUP ATTEMPT, IN HIS VIEW, HAD EXISTED FOR SOME TIME. SO, IT WAS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE EVENTS OF THE PREVIOUS DAY HAD OCCURRED. THESE OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS, CARDOZO ADDED, WERE THE FAILURE OF SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS TO COME TO GRIPS WITH NATIONAL PROBLEMS LIKE THE DECLINING STANDARDS OF LIVING BOTH IN THE MILITARY AND ELSEWHERE, AND THE GROWING INTRUSION OF POLITICAL FACTORS IN MILITARY PROMOTIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS.

#### MILITARY REFORM

5. CARDOZO SAID THAT IN 1990 HE HAD BEEN THE FIRST SENATOR IN THIRTBZSXTO ABSTAIN IN THE VOTE ON THE PROMOTION LIST, OWING TO THE USE OF BLATANTLY POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CHOOSING THE PROMOTEES. UNFORTUNATELY, CARDOZO CONTINUED, CONDITIONS IN THE MILITARY ARE PROPITIOUS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF "CAUDILLOS" OR STRONGMEN AND "ROSCAS" OR CLIENTALIST GROUPINGS. THIS SITUATION IN TURN MEANS THAT POLITICS WILL PLAY AN INCREASINGLY MORE IMPORTANT ROLE IN DECISIONS ON PROMOTIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS. IN RESPECT TO ASSIGMENTS, CARDOZO NOTED, MANY OFFICERS TOTALLY UNQUALIFIED BY EXPERIENCE ARE BEING

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GIVEN COMMANDS. THE PROBLEM, HE CONTINUED, IS THAT MORE THAN 70 PERCENT OF ARMED FORCES OFFICERS HAVE RECEIVED AT LEAST SOME UNIVERSITY EDUCATION. THEREFORE, THEY ARE COMPETENT, EDUCATED AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, DISCIPLINED AND EVER LESS WILLING TO TOLERATE WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS BUFFOONERY IN NATIONAL POLITICS. (COMMENT: THIS RUNS DIRECTLY AGAINST THE "PROFESSIONALISM" ARGUMENT FOR

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CONTROLLING LATIN MILITARY.)

EFFECT ON POLITICS

6. CARDOZO EXPECTS THAT THE ATTEMPTED COUP WILL HAVE A RESTRAINING EFFECT ON NATIONAL POLITICAL LIFE, MAKING INDIVIDUALS CAUTIOUS ABOUT FLAUNTING WEALTH AND IRRESPONSIBILITY. HE IS UNSURE WHETHER IT WILL HELP A PARTICULAR PARTY. HE HOPES THAT CAP WILL USE THE ATTEMPTED COUP AS A PRETEXT TO INVOLVE ALL PARTIES AND SECTORS MORE HEAVILY IN RESOLVING THE COUNTRY'S PRESSING NATIONAL PROBLEMS. THE IDEAL WOULD BE A NEW CABINET OF NATIONAL UNITY REPRESENTING ALL PARTIES. CAP ALSO NEEDS

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T-01 USIE-00 /050W  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 CARACAS 01195

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SUBJECT: COPEI PRESIDENT HILARION CARDOZO ON FEBRUARY 4  
TO IMPROVE THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMUNICATION WITH THE  
COUNTRY. CARDOZO DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT A MAJORITY OF THE  
POPULATION REJECT DEMOCRACY; RATHER, THEY REJECT SPECIFIC  
PARTIES AND INDIVIDUALS. CARDOZO PROFESSES APPREHENSION  
ABOUT THE GROWTH OF RADICAL LEFTIST PARTY "CAUSA R," BASED  
IN PART ON TRADE UNIONS AND PARTICULARLY STRONG IN BOLIVAR  
STATE. CARDOZO ALSO ACKNOWLEDGES THAT COPEI'S LEAD IN THE  
POLLS OWES MORE TO THE UNPOPULARITY OF RIVAL AD THAN TO  
ANYTHING ELSE.

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INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

7. CARDOZO BELIEVES THAT THE MANY EXPRESSIONS OF  
INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT WHICH CAP RECEIVED DURING THE COUP  
ATTEMPT HELPED DEFEAT IT. THIS SUPPORT HELPED CONVINCE  
THOSE MILITARY MEN AND UNITS STRADDLING THE FENCE TO  
SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN THE REBELS.

CALDERA IN THE CONGRESS

8. POLOFF ASKED CARDOZO ABOUT THE SPEECH MADE IN THE  
CONGRESS BY EX-PRESIDENT CALDERA, IN WHICH HE APPEARED TO  
ATTRIBUTE THE COUP ATTEMPT IN PART TO IMF ECONOMIC  
POLICIES AND THE FOREIGN DEBT, AND EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT  
THE PLOTTERS MEANT TO KILL PRESIDENT PEREZ. CARDOZO WAS  
NOT EMBARRASSED BY CALDERA'S SPEECH (WHICH HAD REPORTEDLY  
SHOCKED SOME CONGRESSMEN; MORE FOLLOWS SEPTTEL). CARDOZO  
IS KNOWN AS MILDLY PRO-CALDERA, ALTHOUGH AS PARTY  
PRESIDENT HE TRIES TO STAY ABOVE THE FERNANDEZ-CALDERA  
BATTLE. HE CLAIMED THAT CALDERA WAS SPEAKING AS A

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CONSCIENTIOUS LAWYER, HIS BASIC NATURE, DRAWING FINE  
DISTINCTIONS ABOUT THE INTENTIONS OF THE COUP LEADERS.  
(WE ARE NOT CONVINCED.)

COMMENT

9. CARDOZO IS A RESPECTED FIGURE WITH LONG EXPERIENCE  
NEAR THE TOP OF VENEZUELAN POLITICS. WE REPORT HIS WORDS  
FOR WHAT THEY ARE WORTH. NOW THAT A COUP ATTEMPT HAS  
OCCURED, LOTS OF PEOPLE SAY THEY WERE NOT SURPRISED. BUT,  
IN THE EVENT, NEARLY EVERYONE WAS VERY SURPRISED. SOME  
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TEPID COUP RUMORS HAD BEEN COMMON GOSSIP AT THE TIME OF  
THE VIOLENT STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN NOVEMBER-EARLY  
DECEMBER, BUT THE SITUATION SINCE THEN APPEARED TO HAVE  
STABILIZED. WE WOULD DISAGREE WITH HIS COMMENTS ABOUT THE  
GROWTH OF "CAUDILLO" FIGURES IN THE MILITARY -- THE  
REALITY IS THE OPPOSITE -- BUT WE AGREE PARTLY WITH HIS  
VIEWS ABOUT PATRONAGE "ROSCAS" AFFECTING OFFICERS'  
PROMOTIONS, ALTHOUGH THAT CUTS BOTH WAYS: TRADITIONALLY,  
SUCH NETWORKS OF PATRONAGE HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED AS A  
FACTOR HELPING TO CONTROL THE OFFICER CORPS, RATHER THAN  
AS A FACTOR THAT MIGHT PUSH (SOME OF) THEM TOWARD REVOLT.  
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